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GeoData Organizational Initiative Moves Forward

Fifty geographic information professionals met October 13-15, 1999 in Denver, Colorado to advance an innovative public-private organizational initiative to improve geographic information coordination in the United States. Local, tribal, state, federal, academic, and private sectors were represented. The geodata organizational initiative was one of the recommended actions from the 1999 National GeoData Forum: Making Livable Communities a Reality.

This new organizational initiative addresses the issue of governance of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure. The geospatial community has been trying for several years to conceive of a way to coordinate the activities of the various organizations with a stake in the production, description, delivery, and use of geospatial data. Industry experts estimate that hundreds of millions of dollars are wasted each year due to incompatible naming conventions for geographic features and incompatible schemas for "metadata" that describes data collections; and lack of incentives and procedural models for organizations to share data that they have collected. Solving these and other problems will yield significant savings, expanded capabilities, and much new economic activity. There appears to be general agreement in the community that what is needed is a governance structure of distributed decision-making and shared leadership.

The October meeting focused on discussions with The Chaordic Alliance. The Chaordic Alliance is a not-for-profit formed by Dee Hock to assist in the creation of a new type of organization that balances chaos and order, cooperation and competition through principle-based, non-hierarchical governance structures that make them flexible, open, effective, and durable. Dee Hock is the founder of VISA International, a for-profit, non-stock membership corporation that processed transactions worth approximately \$1.3 trillion in 1998. VISA International is an example of this new type of "chaordic" organizational structure, though Mr. Hock emphasized that it is not a perfect model for the creation of a new national geodata governance structure.

The geodata community representatives at the meeting agreed to work together in ad hoc teams to conduct preliminary planning for the financing, organization, staffing, and promotional activities for a public-private project to create a chaordic organizational governance structure. The two-year project—to be initiated in late 1999—will work to design the governance structure, with guidance from The Chaordic Alliance. Key objectives include making the governance structure inclusive, democratic, and harmonious with existing efforts and organizations in this arena. Funding will come from both public and private sources.

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